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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

3 November 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT : Studies of European Opinion Prepared by the
Rockefeller Office

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The Rockefeller office has issued a series of papers analyzing European opinion trends before and after the Summit Conference at Geneva.^{1/} These papers are based largely upon the USIA's Barometer Surveys in the principal countries of Western Europe, occasionally supplemented by material from press and official sources.

2. The Rockefeller papers provide a number of valuable analyses and insights developed from and going somewhat beyond the bare results of the polls upon which they are principally based.^{2/}

1/ One of the papers concerns European opinion on Far Eastern questions and some of the papers contain sections on opinion in other areas. In these other areas, the opinions recorded are derived chiefly from press and official sources rather than from opinion polls.

2/ However, the Rockefeller reports use the poll data without informing the reader of the size of sample used, the sampling technique employed, or the percentage of possible error.

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3. There is a natural tendency to build somewhat too large a structure of conclusions upon the foundation of such polls. Generally speaking, this tendency has been kept under control in the earlier issues of the reports. In the later issues, we are disturbed by the drawing of broad implications from what seems to us to be, in at least some instances, an insufficiency of data.

4. Some danger also exists in furnishing papers of this nature direct from the Rockefeller office to policy-makers without putting them clearly on notice that though such papers represent an analysis of evidence concerning public opinion they are not necessarily a complete and accurate guide to the probable policies of foreign governments.

DISCUSSION

5. The Rockefeller papers are principally based on the "Barometer Surveys" published by the USIA on an intermittent basis. According to USIA, the Barometer Surveys derive from samplings of approximately 800 cases in each country surveyed, gathered on the basis of probability sampling to insure a correct representation of the population 21 years of age and over. Interviewing is done by contract under native auspices so that American interests are not apparent. USIA

cautions that the surveys should not be interpreted as of absolute precision, but considers the results accurate within five percentage points.

6. In general, the introduction of the Barometer series has been a very valuable development in the intelligence art. They provide a most helpful additional factor for the use of analysts in assessing the foreign reaction to various developments in the world or to various US policies. Thus they may assist in estimating the magnitude of some of our foreign policy problems. The Barometer reports constitute a supplement, and sometimes a corrective, to regular Embassy reports on foreign opinion.

7. The Rockefeller reports are both an analysis and an extension of the Barometer surveys. They consider the trends in opinion, especially in relation to US policy, and they draw some general conclusions about the significance of such trends for US policy and objectives. They are, therefore, something more than a flat statement of poll results, and sometimes contain sound and illuminating interpretations of opinion data. For example, in a report of 11 June discussing opinion factors relating to the Summit Conference, the following are among the analyses made:

- a. The Barometer Surveys had shown responses from West Germany, France, the UK, and Italy ranging from 36 to

43 percent in favor of siding with neither East nor West in the cold war, and from 40 to 54 percent in favor of neutrality in the event of a hot war. However, only half of those favoring neutrality thought their country could in fact remain neutral. This was interpreted in the Rockefeller paper as indicating "only the scope of the desire for neutrality" at the public opinion level.

- b. The Rockefeller paper concludes that public opinion attitudes in Western Europe "appear to be a compromise between two factors, among others: (a) strong aspirations for 'peace' and hence, in certain circumstances, for 'neutrality'; (b) practical considerations having to do with 'security,' among which US defense support (as symbolized by NATO) looms large."

8. However, there is, as indicated below, always a danger of attempting to draw too many or too firm conclusions from public opinion surveys, even if one assumes that the poll is technically sound, that

is, that the sample is large enough and properly balanced, that the right questions were asked in the right way, etc. Without attempting a detailed analysis of every conclusion in the Rockefeller papers, and the apparent supporting evidence, we believe that a consistent degree of reserve in interpreting the data has not been maintained. The illustrations noted in the preceding paragraph were from the first report, dated 11 June. But the data considered three months later, in a report of 23 September, do not appear to have been treated with the same care and attention to their limitations. For example, the latter report states the following regarding European attitudes toward NATO:

- a. "There is little doubt that the net result of the Summit Conference⁷ has been a further undermining of the Western Alliance, as represented by NATO, in terms of public opinion support, including the opinion of the more influential upper socio-economic groups. American foreign policy in general, and US military security in particular, are based on a system of alliances, of which NATO is the most important. The opinion situation developing in Western Europe appears to challenge the bases of American policies with respect to Europe -- and, in particular, raises the question of

whether continuing reliance can be placed on NATO as the core of US-European policy."

- b. "Putting it conservatively, the foregoing data tend to show that attitudes favorable to NATO's future are by no means firmly structured in the minds of either the general public nor the upper groups of Western Europe. NATO, in fact, appears highly vulnerable from the opinion point of view. At the least, it appears that the people of Western Europe are now willing to consider security arrangements alternative to NATO and defense measures alternative to present NATO dispositions."

9. The above conclusions apparently were based principally upon questions asked in August which produced substantially the following results:

- a. The percentage of persons interviewed who knew their country was a member of NATO ranged from 43 to 63 percent.
- b. The percentage who considered that NATO had "done well" varied from 10 to 30 percent.


- c. The percentage who favored replacement of NATO by a security system to which the US and USSR were both a party ranged from 38 to 43 percent, with only 12 to 19 percent desiring retention of NATO as an alternative.
- d. The percentage favoring withdrawal of troops from the Continent and overseas bases by the US and UK and Soviet withdrawal to their own borders varied from 44 to 57 percent. Taking composite averages the percentages in favor rose 12 percentage points from June to August.
- e. In the upper socio-economic groups, the numbers who preferred retaining NATO to a new security system including the USSR ranged from 18 to 33 percent, while the troop and base withdrawal proposition was supported by from 46 to 56 percent.

10. The data developed from the polls are certainly disquieting on their face, but there are a number of reasons why we do not believe they should on their face be accepted as sufficient reason for the alarming conclusions which were drawn from them:

- a. The polls were taken during the first flush of popular optimism resulting from the friendly atmosphere at Geneva.

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- b. Much of the sympathy for the broad security arrangements and the troop withdrawal proposition which were postulated could just as well be regarded as "desire" or "aspiration," much as the writer interpreted the so-called "neutrality" sentiment which emerged from earlier polls. Moreover, the annoyances which normally accompany the presence of foreign troops, and, in the case of West Germany, the clear implications of troop withdrawal for reunification were almost certainly factors in the responses of many of those polled.
 - c. The results of the polls do not constitute sufficient evidence to conclude that we are faced with an "undermining of the Western alliance." The questions asked were hypothetical propositions which struck a favorable chord in the aspirations of people who were encouraged by the Geneva atmosphere; those questions did not go to basic foundations of the North Atlantic community.

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